

M - 131,091
S - 237,289

SPIDER-FLY HORROR

'Pretty Poison' Pretty Thrilling

By JAMES MEADE

The San Diego Union Theater Writer

"Pretty Poison," the 20th Century-Fox color film at the Balboa, Big Sky and Pacific, is one of those little movies that are more compelling than some of the major efforts. Essentially, it concerns the destruction of fancy by reality.



Meade

Lorenzo Semple Jr.'s screenplay is based on Stephen Geller's first novel, "She Let Him Continue," a more provocative title than the one the movie is saddled with.

It has Tony Perkins as a 22-year-old parolee from an institution where he has been confined as a disturbed teenager since he was 15. His explanation for burning down his aunt's house is that he did not know she was in it, thus admitting to arson but denying murder.

Perkins' parole officer, John Randolph, gets Perkins a job in a chemical plant in a New England small town. Perkins' predilection for assigning himself to fanciful, adventurous roles in life leads him to pose as a CIA agent, investigating the plant for subversive stream pollution.

Enjoys A Childish Game

Perkins goes slinking about like a little boy at play, taking photographs and studying maps, enjoying his childish game of make-believe. When Tuesday Weld, cast as an innocent-looking honor student who cuts quite a figure on the high school drill team, catches Perkins' fancy, she also seals his doom.

Miss Weld, a potential Bonnie, accepts Perkins because he represents an alternative to small-town boredom and adult restrictions. Miss Weld turns Perkins' relatively harmless espionage game into frightening reality by killing a plant watchman and her mother.

She blithely passes the blame to Perkins. He accepts it, seemingly because Miss Weld is the only one who ever offered him a moment of the love he craves, even if she said it without meaning it.

There is much that is Hitchcockian about this film made by debuting producers Marshal Backlar and Noel Black, who earlier had some success with short subjects, including "Skaterdater."

An Off-Beat Aura Of Horror

The everyday look of the town gives the film an off-beat aura of horror in gingham and murder in daylight. It also follows the Hitchcock tradition of bizarre events in commonplace settings. It also lets its audience in on events to come, thus providing suspense at the expense of mystery.

Miss Weld is a fine actress, a fact obscured by her too-early Hollywood starlet publicity and the handicap of a baby face unsuitable for mature roles. She gives this black widow spider, disguised by attractive plumage, just the right appearance of deceptive normality.

Perkins does a professional job in a difficult role.

In the spider-and-the-fly epilogue of the film, Miss Weld begins spinning her web for another victim, Ken Kercheval. It is enough to make audiences shout, "Look out! She's dangerous!"